

# The Manchester Journal.

NUMBER 13

MANCHESTER, VERMONT, JULY 10, 1919

VOLUME LIX

## LETTER FROM THE ORIENT

Interesting Experiences in the Far East Related by a Former Bennington County Man.

Near Singapore, Malay States, One and One-half Degrees from the Equator, Friday, November 22, 1918.

Dear Friends:—

On board Chinese steamship bound homeward, wish you could have joined me five minutes ago. It was in a six by seven cabin with about ten Chinamen, one was scooted on the dresser (?) almost inside the horn of a gramophone on which another was playing indescribable Chinese records. You will be surprised to learn that I am returning a casualty. I have had one of these tropical diseases and the doctors are sending what is left of me, skin and bones mostly, back to Uncle Sam. It has been almost seven months now and I am much better, the doctors tell me that six months' rest in a cold climate will straighten me out but that I must not return to the tropics. This, however, is part of the price of work out here, a certain percentage of us must go under.

We thought we were settled for life, it has been a little upsetting to have to pull up stakes so soon, but we have had three wonderful years of experience. Burma is the wealthy country of India, Rangoon claims to be the second city in the world in the number of immigrants who enter it annually. All parts of Asia come to Rangoon in the same way that all parts of Europe come to New York, with the difference that in Rangoon each retains its own dress and customs. Any day you can see on the streets representatives of every country in Asia and Europe, from the black Madrassey coolie with his loin cloth to the Japanese lady in silk, from the purda lady of India with her face always covered to the Russian peasant or thrifty Armenian. You meet here under the tropical sun the French priest in long black robes and broad black hat, the English high churchman in his long white robe and Curzon topee and the American missionary in a high cut vest and Prince Albert coat designed for semi-arctic climate. But give us credit, we Americans are fast discarding our formal clothes and adopting light clothes. The middle class of India is prone to adopt English clothes with the one exception that he insists on wearing the shirt outside of the trousers according to the custom of his native garments. The Burman men and women alike wear light jackets and longees, silk skirts of bright patterns, most attractive costumes. The native barber and his subject scoot down in front of each other, while a bell on the barber's shears announces each clip and advertises for the next customer.

All comers to Burma adopt the Burman bath, for the reason that there is not other to be had. Water is carried by the servants and poured into large jars, with small necks, known as peju jars. You dip the water out with a cup and pour it over yourself. They tell of a Methodist missionary who on his first arrival in Burma, not understanding the method, attempted to get into the peju jar, with success. His efforts to get out, however, were not so successful. He summoned aid, but his fellow missionaries decided that an action so thoroughly Baptist on the part of a Methodist was a matter for the Bishop and dignitaries. These were collected and with their sanction and in their presence the jar was solemnly cracked with an axe and the prisoner liberated.

The sun is the great problem in the tropics. We venture out but little between 10 a. m. and 3 p. m. and never for a moment without a topee: this is a pith or cork hat about an inch thick. During the middle of the day it is not safe even to step into the sun to pick up something. My topee was knocked off one day in the blazing sun, and in the moment of exposure while I recovered it, I acquired a raging headache. On the other hand, moonlight in the tropics is a dream, the people shut in during the heat of the day, go out at night, the streets are lined with outdoor shops and eating places. To go for a walk under the tropical moon, one can help but think, "What an ideal situation for love making," in spite of the fact that he knows there is no such thing in Asia. These things are arranged by the parents and relatives often without consulting or even informing the parties directly concerned. Excepting very slightly in spots where western civilization is touching there is no association whatever between young men and women in India, China or Japan. In Burma we have probably the nearest approach and it is very little, a few co-educational lower

schools are tolerated and girls are admitted to the college department of our institution. The position of women in Burma is probably the highest among indigenous people of Asia. The man sits with his legs crossed and meditates while the woman buys, sells and manages, thus she secures a larger degree of freedom. The Burman Buddhist has but one wife, divorce is free but as a rule he remains with the first wife and both are loyally devoted to the children.

I have been impressed with how much the religion and philosophy of a people affect their development. Buddhism teaches meditation and the suppression of desire; Christianity praises the man or woman who "searches diligently" for what he desires. If a man in America desires something he works and strives for it until he gets it and in so doing develops life all around him. If a man in Burma desires anything, he sits down, meditates and stifles the desire, with the result that his life and that of his neighbors is just about as barren and constricted as it was in the time of Christ.

The standards of living are not as low as in India proper, but are low enough. It is so warm that clothes are not necessary for warmth, houses are needed only to shelter from rain and sun, fuel is only for cooking. Bamboo grows like weeds. With a few pieces of bamboo and some thatch a house can be constructed quickly. A recent fire destroyed 300 houses, the total loss was reported as about Rupees 15000, (\$500). There are any number of men who possess nothing but a loin cloth, a blanket and a few things tied up in a rag. At night in the dry season the sidewalks in the business section have rows sleeping as close as they can lie. These are mostly Indians. The Burmans generally are a little better off. I suppose there is not place on earth where humanity is cheaper and the Englishman makes this an excuse for absence of modern methods. He will employ a hundred coolies to excavate and carry out the dirt on their heads, because he says it is cheaper than a horse shovel. Of course it is not, but he has always been told so and has never stopped to figure it out. And thus this ancient English tradition that no man is of any value unless his father was a gentleman, (i. e. a man who never worked with his hands) stands in the way of progress.

This is not to say that we do not have many things to learn from the Orient. The Oriental men carry their heavy bundles on their heads a far easier way than ours of tugging things first in one hand and then in the other. There is no way of carrying a baby as easily as the Chinawoman carries her on her back. We call the East unprogressive but it will take on every one of our modern inventions before the American woman will carry her baby on her back or the American man will carry his suitcase on his head. The Japanese method of leaving the shoes at the door and only entering the house in the stocking feet is not only more comfortable but far more cleanly than our method of tracking all the dirt of the street into our homes.

We could write volumes on amusing and interesting experiences. Mrs. Bartlett got a reputation last summer for killing a six foot six snake. She was up country; I heard the story first and later learned the facts from her. The servants are great cowards and when she found a long snake hanging from the rafters in the chamber she proceeded to lock up in the rooms the wallah and a club until the snake was dead. One of the missionaries had the experience of having a small boy return the washing one week. Now, usually it was brought by the father, the mother or some one of the older children. On asking the little fellow why he brought it, he replied, "All the rest have just died with the plague."

But one of the best ones is on a missionary who was in America on his first furlough. He was to be married to a young lady also home on her first furlough. (This is all true but the names.) He was travelling in New York state and in a certain city went to church on Sunday, as all good missionaries should. On the printed church calendar he found the following notice, concerning his fiancée, "The missionary on our prayer list for this week is Miss Evelyn Mason who for five years has been a missionary in Burma. She is now home on her furlough and is shortly to be married to Rev. K. S. Brown, who is in charge of our mission at T——, Burma. Pray for Miss Mason."

One of the great sights of Burma is a Hypoogyi cremation. When a Hypoogyi, Buddhist High Priest, dies, or rather about ten months or a year

after he dies, they hold a great ceremony which is similar to a fair. A few acres of ground are covered with booths, made of bamboo and paper. Buildings are constructed which from a little distance look like pieces of architecture. Theatres are constructed in this way. We saw an imitation battle ship on the decks of which danced hundreds of Burman girls. It was all made of bamboo and paper. A great elephant is constructed as large as a three story house. Families who can afford it each erect a small booth. Then the body of the Hypoogyi, preserved they say by being filled with honey and coated with gold leaf (I have seen two) is brought in and the fun begins. For a week the body is carried from one booth to another, remaining a short time in each. While it remains there the owner entertains and feasts all of his friends, thus all gain merit. After about a week the great night comes, the body is drawn to the top of the great elephant, inside of which is a mass of kindling wood, and the whole is set on fire.

There is no end of amusing signs; a favorite is "Bill Stickers may be prosecuted," from which you may draw your own conclusions as to Bill's character. In Hong Kong a Chinese furniture merchant displays his sign, "A Tack & Co.," while a Chinese tinker has one: "Pots and pans can mend any mortal thing can do." A Japanese tailor desires to cater to the foreign ladies and hangs up a sign, "Ladies Outfitter, Ladies can have fits up stairs." On one of the high streets in Kobe I saw a sign, "Physician, specialist on internal diseases." A Burman lad in an English school, but who had at one time been in an American mission school, went to the English head master on July 3rd and asked if they were going to have a holiday the next day. "What for?" asked the Englishman. "Why, don't you know, tomorrow is the day we licked the English."

But in spite of all the funny things and all the primitive things and all the bad things, these people have a way of getting next to your heart. Some think that these people are inferior, but I am not convinced. To me they seem just crushed, crushed by ignorance, by tradition, by climate, by misrule, (many times better now than before the English came, but bad enough now), and by religions, religions which stifle every effort toward progress.

We are having calm seas now. At night the ocean is frequently speckled close to the boat with phosphorescent fish, in the day time flying fish jump into the air before the prow of the ship. These are able only to rise a little above the surface, but by means of the momentum and a rapid motion of the wings they maintain themselves in the air for twenty or thirty yards before again diving. One of the prettiest things that we have seen is dolphins playing. They are a heavy fish, but throw themselves far out of the water, make a graceful semi-circle in the air and dive only to gain momentum by a reverse semi-circle under water and to shoot again into the air. To see a number of them chasing one another in and out of the water thus is a beautiful sight. One day in the Bay of Bengal the sudden appearance of a huge bamboo near the ship, followed by the wake of a shark coming toward the boat gave all the sensations of a submarine attack except the danger.

There is a Spanish gentleman with his wife on board. She occupies a cabin with Mrs. B. She speaks only Spanish, Portuguese and French, while Mrs. B. speaks only English, American and Yankee. The gentleman, however, speaks considerable English, and with my little French we get along. The first evening the lady asked in French if Mrs. B. was going to dress for dinner. While I was getting ready to interpret, the gentleman made it clear with the remark, "Ze Madam wishes to know, ze lady, vill she put on her night dress for dinner?"

Sunday, December 1, 1918. Entering the Harbor of Hong Kong After Seven Days' Storm on the China Sea.

Oh! What a boat! Mrs. B. had what the agent called a berth in a state-room, and what I should describe as a board in a pig sty. At night I took my pillow and steamer rug, ascertained the direction of the wind, found a sheltered spot, and cuddled down. It is a surprise how comfortably one can sleep on the floor or on a box, just as comfortably as on a bed when you learn. The only trouble is the cold, and we do not get much of that in this part of the world. At Rangoon we gave our boys in the dormitory beds and they would bring in boards and put on the beds for comfort. There is a bench on the fore deck,

like a park bench; when I could get that I called myself lucky; it is the most comfortable place on board. But this is hard on some who have had cases of "culture" or "refinement," especially those in whom these maladies are inherited. These two diseases flourish in the tropics and if one has the germs in his system, before he comes out it is apt to go hard with him. It has been tough on even an old saw mill hand like myself sometimes. I was just out of the hospital where I had been on milk diet, then the smells, the food or the sea sickness were any one enough to produce certain, sudden, violent and unpleasant agitations of the stomach. Four hundred and fifty coolies were aboard and they were packed in like sheep. However, we had a fairly smooth sea down the west side to Singapore, but here we learned that it was the stormy season up the east side in the China sea and that 1,400 more coolies were to be taken aboard. How they did pack them in! Armour or Swift could get some pointers on packing from that boat. There was just room to stand between decks, but they put up light platforms making an intermediate deck. Thus they packed them in like sardines, actually more so, for sardines in cans sleep 24 hours per day while the Chinamen slept in shifts. Under these conditions we have been fighting the storm for seven days, the boat tossing like a chip. Perhaps it does not seem good to feel smooth harbor water under your boat again, and also feel a breath of real cool air, the first in many months.

Shanghai, China, December 21, 1918.

Waiting for a Trans-Pacific Boat.

I am enclosing a couple of pictures from Burma. The little elephant lives just below us. I had the idea of getting Mrs. B. and the baby elephant to caressing each other and then to get a picture. Well, I tried, and they no more than saw each other than they took opposite directions. It took a good share of a forenoon to get these two near enough to each other to get them in the same picture.

It is real cold weather here. I never knew how to appreciate it before. How it does brace one! I had been almost a month out of the hospital when I left Rangoon and had gained practically nothing. I was 25 pounds under weight. I gained but little enroute to Hong Kong, but since I scribbled the last I have gained 15 pounds. I can climb three flights of stairs or walk a mile. I feel like myself again. I have had a thorough physical examination here and the doctors tell me that I still have germs. (Apparently it is only an armistice that I have established.) I am not worrying, however, these tropical diseases are usually easy to get rid of in a cold climate. But I am anxious to see old U. S. A. again.

We secured passage from Hong Kong to Shanghai on the Columbia after only three days' wait. It is a Pacific Mail Boat, U. S. registry and is the finest boat that we have been on. But how they do eat on these boats; well there is nothing else to do. We had our little breakfast in bed (at least other passengers did; we still stick to the back woods custom of getting up first,) big breakfast at 8, at the next day resulted in no leaks, 10 apples were passed, at 11:30 broth and crackers were served on the decks, at 1 p. m. tiffin (English for "big lunch"), at 4 tea including toast, jam and cakes. The tea habit is another thing that we have not caught; it is so hard to break away from our provincialisms. At 7 a dinner of about 12 courses is served, at 9 coffee and sandwiches on the deck, and later at night lunch was served in the smoking room and game room for those who sat up. One could almost starve on that boat, they gave us nothing from the time we went to bed at night until almost time to get up in the morning. Fortunately they did not call the roll at meals, so we skipped about two-thirds of the time.

This is the great metropolis of the East and a most interesting city. Judging by prices it is the most progressive city we have ever visited. I suppose you have prices in America but can you beat these? Lowest priced hotel \$8 per day and up (these are Shanghai dollars worth about 93c American money now). The same trunk for which we paid \$30 in America, \$165; gloves \$9.50, movies 75c to \$2, butter \$1.40 per pound, soft coal \$30 to \$32 per ton, Gillette razor \$12.50, collar 40c, Remington typewriter \$260.

Most of China uses dollars and cents, but each city or province has its own and each has a different value. One sort of a dollar is worth 93c, another 50c, another less, some much

less. A Y. M. C. A. secretary handed to another a good sized roll of bills of the city to which the other was going. The other offered to pay, but he replied, "Never mind, the whole roll is worth only 40 cents." There are dollars, 20c pieces, dimes and coppers. There are also cash, a small coin with a hole in the center, ten to a copper. At the big stores you count the same as you would in America. But the different coins vary somewhat in relative value. At a money changers you can get 11 coppers for a dime, but if you wish to buy a dime you must pay 12 coppers. For a silver dollar you can get 11 dimes and six coppers, while if you wish to buy a silver dollar it costs you twelve dimes. These ratios vary from day to day. In Shanghai there is the dollar and cents system which is used for all small and retail business. For wholesale and large business taels are used. The value is based on silver and the ratio with dollars varies; now it is worth about \$1.37. The tael is also divided into one hundred parts called cents, but there are no coins; there are, however, bills. You have to look at each bill to see whether it is dollars or taels; you can have your bank account in either one or in both. Imagine trying to keep books? On every block there are money changers who make a small commission on these exchanges of money.

I should have told you about our milk problem in Burma. They have a kind of cow which gives about a pint of milk. This is sold from door to door by dude-wallows, and in pails. They always put a handful of grass or straw or anything that they can pick up, into the pail to prevent it from splashing. Then every native through whose hands it passes takes a drink and supplies the amount with water. You cannot stop it. Some have tried to keep their own cow, but the man who milks it takes his share and the cook does the same. We tried everything we could think of. We thought once that we had settled the question while paying a large price to the largest milk industry in the city. We found that we were getting buffalo milk, diluted with three parts of water and treated with ample amounts of formaldehyde. One missionary bought his own cow, bought his own pasture, built a bamboo house on it and hired a durwan to live there and watch it. Then he made another servant bring the cow up to the house, wash it, and milk it in his presence. Did he succeed? Well, he learned after a time that the durwan was letting out the privilege of milking the cow for so much per night.

Off the Coast of the Aleutian Islands, January 13, 1919.

What a change. I began this letter a degree and one-half from the equator. Now I am continuing it off the coast of Alaska, in January, but we are not suffering from the cold; in fact we are having a very good voyage.

But this is an English boat, and it is very hard for us Yankees to appreciate the English. It is lots easier to sympathize with the Chinese or Hindoos. I remember one of the missionaries employed a native workman to repair a leaky roof. The workman spent all day at the job and as a rain at the next day resulted in no leaks, he was paid. About the same time the missionary missed several pails and buckets. A heavy rain a few days later resulted in streams of water in the living rooms. Investigation discovered the fact that no hole in the roof had been repaired but that a bucket had been placed under every large hole and that little strips of bamboo had been adjusted to guide the water from the small holes into the same buckets. This worked admirably until the buckets were full. And on this boat the steam pipes leak in many places, and instead of repairing them the Englishman has hung little buckets below each leak. And this brings up the whole question of the English. We like them, they have done a great deal for the Orient. As a rule they are inclined to dislike us. We are coarse, commercial and unrefined; we even think more of the ability that a man may possess than of who his father was, and we do not hesitate to work with our hands. The polite English business hours in Burma are from 11 a. m. to 2 p. m. Ordinarily Chota Hazara (little breakfast) is served in bed, the morning hours are spent in ease and "pajamas," breakfast proper about 9:30 to 10; tiffin in the office at 1, tea at 3:30 to 4:30, and dinner late. The Englishman lounges around in his pajamas, entertains his wife's callers or whoever it may be in the morning, but is shocked if an American takes off his

coat at his desk later in the day. He is polite to the T and a gentleman to the bone. He is sympathetic to us poor Americans from the edge of the world. A tailor objected strenuously to putting hip pockets in trousers but at last consented with the remark, "Oh! I forgot that you Americans still live where you have to carry pistols." I read an editorial in an English magazine which spoke of "the parts of America where English is still spoken." An English doctor questioned my going to America, as I should not go to a place where there was not a pathological laboratory. The Englishman is a little inclined to say with the Oriental and with a few Americans, "If it has been done this way for years, it is proved to be the best way." I may surprise some of you to know that English law in India still permits a man to collect interest at the rate of 10 per cent per month or even higher and sends the poor debtor to jail if he cannot pay it. I fought through a law suit for a poor black servant; his crime (?) had been to sign a note with a fellow servant, whose mother was sick and starving over in India, for Rupees twenty (\$6.66). At an interest of 10 per cent per month the note soon increased to an amount which these men could not pay out of their wages of Rs 15 per month. I employed a lawyer and did everything in my power, but the law was all against me and in spite of all that I could do, my man, one of the best black men that I ever knew, was sentenced to jail for six months by English law.

I have in my folder a clipping from a current English newspaper in India advertising for bids for the privilege of collecting certain taxes. The man who bids the highest gets the privilege of collecting all that he can and retains for himself all that he can collect over. I think I have read of such a system in a very old book that I possess.

The engineer of this boat spends a large proportion of his time playing bridge in the smoking room and leaves the engines to the assistants. None of the passengers were surprised when suddenly something went wrong with the propeller shaft. Something had worked loose, naturally. And for 24 hours in mid-Pacific the engine was not able to start and it is now only able to run slowly. I, with my own eyes, saw the chief engineer down in the engine room about two hours after the accident, in his dress suit smoking cigarettes. Fortunately the sea was as calm as a lake and still is. Do not know what would have happened if there had been a storm.

We have had two wireless calls for aid, one from a boat on fire and one from a boat which had lost a propeller. We turned around and steamed toward one of them all night but in the morning had word that our help was not needed.

Our visit to Japan was most interesting. I was so ill that we would not have stopped in Japan but for the fact that Mrs. B.'s sister is there. We had a hard trip but a good one. I remained at Tokyo while Mrs. B. went north to Sendai and visited her sister. We have a great habit of making the best of things, and it is great to have a good partner. She sat up three nights out of four in a Japanese sleeper, and had only 24 hours with her sister. Hard enough, but we had a great many experiences and saw much which we could not have seen if she had been less brave, and now neither of us would have missed the experiences for anything. Three years ago in Glacier Park she endured all kinds of hardships for two weeks of walking and camping, but it was the most enjoyable two weeks of our lives. I tell you it is great to have a good partner. And since I have been sick she has taken all of the responsibility and has handled it so well that I feel as if there was not much need of me.

She says that I do not write much like a sick man. Well I have not lost courage for a minute; how could I with a partner like that. I am not very sick now but just have this disease which keeps me dragging along and only able to just do a very little. I improved much in China, but do not get well. If I can only regain my health, I will not be sorry for anything, for we have had some great experiences. That makes me think that in China we saw Dutch Reformed Chinamen, French Catholic Chinamen, German Lutheran Chinamen, American Methodist Chinamen, American (Northern) Baptist Chinamen, American (Southern) Chinamen and very many others. They go into church and take the very best seats

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